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ABSTRACT

To provide a description of children's strategies for acquiring and protecting status in peer interactions, participant observation fieldwork was conducted in a classroom of 24 kindergarteners in a low socioeconomic status urban public school. During the period from January through May of 1983, 26 observational visits were made and 80 hours of child-to-child social behavior were recorded. Teachers, the school principal, the classroom aide, selected district staff, and parents were interviewed. Unobtrusive data (school and district reports, student records, and student- and teacher-produced artifacts) were also utilized. Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence Model was used to guide data collection and analysis procedures. Findings were reported in the form of an "analytic description." While dominating behavior was seen consistently in only a few children, almost all children used peer interactions to attempt to manipulate or control the actions of others. Ways to practice and respond to self-promotion and ways to put others down and defend against put-downs were noted. Contrary to the views of Piaget and Goffman, results indicated that children actively participate in the construction of social events, demonstrate an awareness that peer status is a product of social interaction, and use sophisticated interaction strategies to promote and protect their status. (CB)

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Negotiating Status in a Kindergarten Peer Culture

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This paper reports findings and suggests implications from a study of children's strategies for acquiring and protecting status in interactions with peers in a kindergarten classroom. The study applies naturalistic data collection and analytical techniques and focuses on children's negotiations of influence and prestige in face-to-face interactions with classmates. Children's strategies for improving their status relative to that of peers (self-promotions, put-downs, and responses to these) are described using primary data from field note transcriptions. Implications are drawn for educational researchers and other social scientists, and for educational practioners.

Although the literature on children's social behavior in classrooms is beginning to grow, the study of childhood culture and child-to-child interaction continue to be neglected areas (Hatch, 1984a; Lightfoot, 1978). This study seeks to contribute to the research on child-to-child interaction, classrooms as social contexts, and the contributions of peers to childhood socialization.

The study is an exploration into the social world of one kindergarten classroom. It is a description and analysis of the face-to-face reality constructed by five-and six-year-olds in school. The ethnographic approach taken in the study and the descriptive quality of the findings qualify the research for inclusion in what Wolcott (1976) called, "a growing literature that only collectively will constitute the ethnography

of American schooling" (p. 24). The study documents children's status goals and strategies for accomplishing them in a particular setting. The findings make possible cross-contextual comparisons which may be useful to educational anthropologists and others interested in the construction of a collective ethnography.

This study is descriptive, not prescriptive, in its outcomes. The goal is to provide a description and analysis intended to improve understandings of what actually happens in the social context of a classroom. Teachers and others responsible for children's experiences in school will find the results useful in understanding the ecology of classroom cultures. The descriptions and analyses of this study may give teachers an alternative framework from which to understand social interaction in their classrooms and new ways of thinking about children's motives and values.

Perspectives, Methods, and Data Source

This study approaches the investigation of children's social behavior from an interactionist theoretical perspective and applies methodological principles, data gathering practices, and analytical techniques from the naturalistic research paradigm (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1978; Guba, 1978). Interactionists take the view that participants in particular contexts construct social reality among themselves through the give and take processes of face-to-face interaction. Naturalistic research undertakes the reconstruction of that reality from the perspectives of the social actors involved. Participant observation, interviewing, and the collection of unobstrusive data are the primary tools for gathering data which reflect naturally occuring social events. Analysis of these data is an inductive, systematic examination to determine the components of the social phenomena under investigation, the relationships among com-

ponents, and their relationship to the wider contexts involved (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Spradley, 1980).

In this study, the researcher conducted participant observation field work in a single kindergarten classroom. During the period from January through May of 1983, twenty-six observational visits were made and eighty hours of child-to-child social behavior were recorded. Days of the week and times of the day were evenly divided among observations. The researcher informally interviewed the classroom teacher, other teachers, the school principal, the classroom aide, selected district staff, and parents as part of the participant observation protocol. The teacher was formally interviewed at the conclusion of the study. Unobtrusive measures, as described by Denzin (1978), were utilized throughout the study. Examples of unobtrusive data include: school and district reports, official documents, student cumulative records, and student and teacher produced artifacts. The researcher took a passive role (Spradley, 1980) in the classroom, making every effort to avoid interaction with children and to blend into the fabric of school life.

Spradley (1980) DRS (Developmental Research Sequence) model was selected to guide the data collection and analysis procedures of this study. Spradley divided the data analysis sequence into 12 steps. The intent of the analysis was to search the data for the social patterns through which the children of the study made sense of their interaction with peers. Selective application of the levels of analysis suggested by the Spradley model made the accomplishment of this goal more feasible. As Spradley (1980) explained, "analysis of any kind involves a way of thinking. It refers to the systemic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among its parts, and their relationship

to the whole" (p. 85). The DRS provides a structure for the systematic examination of social behavior recorded in field notes. Spradley identified several levels of analytic inquiry, including domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and searching for cultural themes. Each of these levels of analysis was applied in this study (for a complete description of research procedures, see Hatch, 1984b).

The study was conducted in a public school located in a large urban school district in the southeastern United States. The school neighborhood is geographically close to the inner city. Over the past few years, some black families have moved into what had been an all white area. The district and the school operate busses under a court ordered desegregation plan.

The research kindergarten had an enrollment of 24: 13 white females; 1 black female; 8 white males; and 2 black males. State law mandates kindergarten attendance and, as required, each child was at least five years old as of September 1, of the school year. Two children were repeating kindergarten. Of the 24 children, 11 had applied for and were receiving free or reduced price school lunches. Fifteen children were living with both parents, six with their mothers alone, and three with a mother and a stepfather. Most children had at least one brother or sister, while the average number of siblings was just over two. The teacher was a white female who had been teaching at the research school for more than 20 years; 6 years in kindergarten.

The research classroom was a well-equipped primary room with sufficient space, facilities, and materials for the kindergarten program. The curriculum provided by the district and implemented by the teacher was organized using a thematic approach. For example, during the month of

January, woodland animals, winter, energy, and Martin Luther King were the themes around which the children's learning activities were organized. Within themes, specific readiness skills were stressed each month. January's skills included, among others, copying first name, combining objects, copying shapes and patterns, recognizing lower case letters, and comparing size, quantity, and volume.

The teacher, as suggested by the district curriculum, divided her day into small group activities before lunch and large group activities after lunch. Children were divided into four ability groups which rotated through four learning centers each morning. In the afternoon, the teacher read stories, presented social studies and science lessons, showed filmstrips and films, and directed physical education, music, art, and language development activities.

Findings

The findings of the study are reported in the form of an "analytic description" (Sevigny, 1981). The ways in which status was acquired and protected in the study are described within the contextual framework of the classroom and primary data, in the form of field note excerpts, are used to support reported findings.

Status, as it is conceptualized in this study, assumes the possibility of constructing a hierarchiecal arrangement of children from those with the least influence and peer esteem to those most respected and most able to exercise power over others (see Freedman, 1977; Strayer and Strayer, 1976). Children's interactions reflected their efforts to improve their position in such a hierarchy. Children's status objectives included the following: to feel more important or better in some ways than classroom peers, to be able to exercise dominance over others, to manipulate or

control the actions of others, and to be able to assert their standing in relationship to the status of others. These goals were evident in almost all of the interactions analyzed in this study.

Children's conversations in small groups often followed this general form: one child made a statement which reflected his or her superiority (an accomplishment, a possession, or a personal quality was usually described); other children matched or topped the original statement with proclamations of their own; the first speaker reasserted his/her superiority; and the cycle continued. An example of this common form follows.

> Don: "I'm tellin' my pet fox to come to school." (Coloring a fox picture is part of their assignment at table 2.) James: "I'ma tell my pet fox to come to school." Don: "I'ma tellin' all my foxes to come to school." Roger: "I'ma have my daddy beat you all up." Don: "I gonna have all my foxes beat all those that's not my friend." Tess: "So what? I've got a German Shepherd." James: "I've got a German Shepherd." Sarah: "So, I got a Doberman." Don: "I've got a bunch." Tess to Don: "My German Shepherd'll bite you." Don: "I've got lots of zoo animals."

In one-to-one interactions and in small groups, children found a variety of ways to promote their own importance and to devalue the importance of others. They spent considerable time and energy introducing favorable information about themselves and unfavorable information about others. Whereas adults practice such behaviors in highly ritualized and subtle ways (Goffman, 1967), children in this study felt no need to disguise their self-promotions or attacks on others. The norm was to proclaim superiority, then defend against the inevitable challenges; or in the case of "put-downs," to point out the inadequacies of others, then react to their protestations.

For some children, it was important to demonstrate dominance over

other children. Some forced others to give up territory or materials using physical force or the threat of physical force. Some ordered others around, called them names, and otherwise abused them verbally. One child (Sarah), continued an on-going dominance relationship over another child (Bob) for the duration of the study.

While dominating behavior was seen consistently in only a few children, almost all children used peer interactions to attempt to manipulate or control the actions of others. Trying to control the acts of others sometimes worked to the disadvantage of those attempting the control acts. When those who were the object of such actions could turn the tables on their peers, those attemting to manipulate appeared foolish or inept. In the first example below, Rod successfully commanded Elizabeth, then, while he was feeling his superior status, anticipated a mistake in her performance. In the second excerpt, Benjamin seemed to be looking for someone to direct and was not successful.

> Rod and Elizabeth each have a set of rubber squares with numerals. They are each putting their own set in order at table 2. Rod gets to the end of the table and places his numeral across the end, moving into a space occupied by Elizabeth. Rod: "Move Elizabeth. Move Elizabeth." She moves. After Rod finishes, he studies Elizabeth as she works: "You better not put that." Elizabeth: "I didn't."

> Benjamin to Teresa: "You got to wash your hands." Teresa: "I'm not finished yet." Benjamin: "I'm not finished either. You got to wash your hands." Teresa: "Not 'til I'm finished." Benjamin: "I'm not talkin' to you. I'm talkin' to Dee Dee." Dee Dee looks at him [with a self-satisfied expression] and wiggles her fingers in his face to show they are clean of paste. Benjamin: "So, I bet you have to wash your hair." Dee Dee: "No, I don't." Benjamin: "So, I don't either." With this, Benjamin glances at Dee Dee and leaves the table.

Much of children's interaction was characterized by the point-counterpoint quality of the last field note example. Children used peer interactions to improve their standings in relation to the status of others. They asserted their importance and attempted to diminish the importance of peers. The abilities to present one's self in a favorable light and to generate credible counters to status threatening behaviors by peers were important assets in an atmosphere in which relative status was redefined over and over. In the following sections, ways to practice self-promotion, ways to respond to self-promotion, ways to put others down, and ways to defend against put-downs will be presented (see Appendix A for a taxonomy of children's strategies for acquiring and protecting status). The description of these interaction typologies will further establish the pervasive influence of status goals on the social behavior of the young children in this classroom.

Ways to practice self-promotion

Self-promoting behaviors among children involved offering information in interactions which had the effect of making the offerer appear superior in some way. In their most basic form, self-promotions were built on I am . . ., I have . . ., I did . . ., I will . . ., I can . . ., or I know . . . statements. Elizabeth demonstrates the basic form in the following interaction with Dee Dee.

> Elizabeth: "I can talk Mexico." Dee Dee: "So can I." Elizabeth: "I can say 'good-bye' -- adios amigo." Dee Dee is silent. She purses her lips [looks as though she can't think of a word to match Elizabeth's.] Elizabeth: "Adios amigo. Adios amigo. That means . . . adios means 'good-bye' and amigo means 'my good friend.' Adios amigo." Dee Dee, still looking troubled: "I got a Strawberry Shortcake." Elizabeth: "Si senior means 'yes,' and Don Diego means 'I gotta go peepee.' " They giggle together.

Closely related to this basic "I am superior" form were statements in which children identified characteristics or possessions of family members, or others with whom the children were closely associated, which cast a favorable light on the speaker. Frequently these self-promotions began with my daddy . . . or my mommy . . . . In the example below, Eddy and Benjamin associate themselves with relatives who live far away and further promote their status by claiming that trips to see the relatives are imminent.

> Eddy: "My uncle J.L. lives in California." Benjamin: "You know what? My cousins live in California. I'm gonna go see 'em." Eddy: "I'm gonna go see my Uncle J.L. (Pause) When I go, I'm gonna stay overnight." When Benjamin does not respond, Eddie continues: "When I come back from California, I'm going to New York. (Pause) Tomorrow I'm going to New York." I see no reaction from Benjamin.

Ways to respond to self-promotion

As is evident in the field-note excerpts presented above, children's self-promotions are received by peers in a variety of ways. The strategies children used in response to status gaining attempts by others were as important to achieving status goals as self-promoting or aggressive kinds of moves. As relative status was defined and redefined in children's interactions, the ability to utilize a variety of defensive-reactive strategies for neutralizing the promotions of others, while placing one's self in a favorable position, was a valuable asset. Many of the strategies used by children in response to self-promoting behaviors of peers are described below.

Children utilized "one-upsmanship" and "bandwagon" strategies in response to self-promotions. One-upsmanship responses attempted to neutralize or diminish the effects of self-promotions by matching or topping

the promoter's information. Bandwagon strategies were responses in which the respondents reacted to self-promotions by identifying themselves with the promoter or with the behavior being promoted. Two excerpts offer examples of one-upsmanship and bandwagon responses.

> At table 5, the teacher explains how the children are to reproduce a pattern of geometric shapes. As she leaves, she says: "Get one pattern done and, if you have time, do one on the other side." After she leaves, four children of the five at the table take turns making "I got time for ___" statements. They filled the blank with numbers which designated how many patterns they expected to complete. The sequence of numbers was: "two," "three," "24," "64," "83," "1000," "2000," "151," "that much" (gesturing with hands wide apart), "a million," and "152." Each child repeated the phrase, "I got time for ___" as he or she delivered the number.
>
> Gina brings a small plastic duck to table 2, says: "I got a duck that smells. Wanna smell?" Amy: "I got one of those little ducklings." Holly: "I do, too." Eddy to Amy: "Everything somebody say, you say."

Eddy's statement at the end of the last example is an example of "challenging" behavior. Children used challenges to devalue the sources from which self-promoters were trying to gain status, or to discredit the self-promoters themselves. Children used approaches which ranged from simple challenges such as "So what!" or "No, you didn't" to more complex challenges which involved building logical cases against the contentions of self-promoters. Two examples which demonstrate children's ability to use complex challenges follow.

> Gina: "I know how to spell 'cat.' " Eddy: "How?" Gina: "C-A-T." Eddy: "So?" Amy: "I know how to spell D . . ., I mean, I know how to spell 'dad,' D-A-D." Robin: "P-Q-D-L." Eddy challenges Amy: "Spell 'bird.' " Amy: "I can't spell 'bird' but I can spell 'dad,' D-A-D." Eddy does not respond.

> George: "I'm gonna color a tree and a cactus." Terry: "I climbed up a cactus once." George: "Uh-un, nobody could climb a cactus. Even if they had gloves, you couldn't climb a cactus." Terry: "I did." George: "There aren't any cactus around here. Where did you climb a cactus?" Terry: "In my yard. We got a cactus in our yard." George: "You got any little babies?" Terry: "No, but my momma's gonna have one." George: "Well, what if that baby got stuck by that cactus?" Terry gulps and looks down. Nadine: "I got a cactus and he like me." George: "How you know he likes you? Cactus can't talk." Nadine: "He let me hold him." George: "You can't hold a cactus and they're too heavy even to pick up." Nadine: "Uh-un, I held this one." George: "I'm gonna color my cactus." Nadine, with a sneer: "So-o-o what!"

In the first excerpt, Eddy attempted to discredit Amy's claim that she was a speller. She accepted his point but pressed her superiority as one who can spell "dad." In the second interchange, George called assertions projected by Terry and Nadine into question. He used his knowledge of cactus, questioning, and inferencing skills of high order (i.e., it would be too dangerous to have cactus in your yard if you had a baby in your family) to construct logical challenges. Terry escaped from the interaction by dropping her eyes and otherwise signalling that she would not respond further. Nadine got the last word by letting George know that she was unimpressed with his declaration of what he intended to do.

Another way children responded to self-promotions was to simply ignore them. Children's refusals to respond to direct communication from peers are almost unknown in adult interaction. When ignoring does occur with adults, the message to the interactant whose communication is ignored is, "You have so little status that I owe you not even the most basic courtesy." When children ignored self-promoting behaviors as in the interaction below,

promoters were not devastated but carried on as if the object of their promotions had simply not heard them.

> Elizabeth and Dee Dee are whispering something about cupcakes at table 2. Rod: "I'm gonna get me a Darth Vadar cake." After no response, Rod repeats: "I'm gonna get me a Darth Vadar cake." The girls give no sign of response and Rod goes back to his work.

Ways to put others down

Children's relative positions in the classroom status hierarchy could be improved by raising themselves up or by causing the influence and peer prestige of others to go down. Ways of aggressively attempting to damage the status of others will be called "put-downs." Successful put-downs not only caused others to lose influence or prestige, but offered evidence of the power and social adeptness of the child accomplishing the put-down.

The most common kind of put-downs ocurred when children pointed out the mistakes, weaknesses, or inadequacies of others. These and most other put-downs had a "public" quality which is important to understanding their place in children's status goals. Put-downs were seldom communicated in private conversations from individual to individual, but were almost always undertaken with a wider audience in mind. Social esteem rests in the perceptions of others. Children publicly proclaimed the inadequacies of peers in an effort to maximize the impact of the put-down. The excerpts below are examples of interactions which were very common in the classroom. The examples show children pointing out mistakes, negative personal attributes, and "poor" dressing habits of other children.

> The teacher has instructed children to take three strips of paper from the box being passed through the class. Eddy sees Phillip take only two strips, says: "You're spoze to have three of 'em." Phillip: 'Two." Eddy: "You don't know what you're talkin' bout. Holly, tell this dumbhead he's spoze to have three."

> Amy has begun passing out pencils while the teacher is still giving instructions. Cheryl [in a voice meant for more than just Amy]: "Hey, put those pencils back." Teacher stops and makes Amy sit down.
>
> As Rod returns to his seat after sharing his puzzle at show and tell, Elizabeth: "Rod always has to act like a gentleman." Rod: "What?" [He heard but doesn't know what she means.] Elizabeth: "Rod always has to act like a gentleman, ah-ah-ah." As she says this, Elizabeth half-closes her eyes, tilts her head in a refined attitude, holds up her wrist and bends it in an aristocratic gesture on each 'ah.' Rod looks down and does not respond.
>
> Gina and Cheryl are admiring themselves and each other in the mirror. Tess comes up, says to Gina: "You wore that (red playsuit) yesterday." Gina: "My mommy wants me to." Tess: "Did you want to?" Gina [looking uncomfortable]: "Uh-huh." Tess: "You wore the same socks, too. And the same shoes." Gina [trying to change subject]: "I don't have shoes like yours." Tess: "You wore the same socks and the same shoes yesterday." Gina slides away to her seat.

Occasionally, some children used more subtle strategies for revealing unfavorable information about peers while securing favorable status for themselves. One such strategy was to turn a condescending attitude on classmates (e.g. "You're actin' silly, I'm doin' somethin' else," or "We're not talkin' like that, we're not even going to repeat it"). Another indirect kind of strategy was to confront others with "loaded" questions. Loaded questions were those which, while appearing to be innocent, were calculated to force children to either do what the asker wished or place themselves in an unfavorable position. Below, Sandra asks loaded questions of two peers as they prepare birthday cards for her. Although Elizabeth does not allow Sandra to trap her, she feels the impact of Sandra's loaded question. Sandra's strategy works successfully on Amy.

> Sandra to Elizabeth: "Are you going to make me an 'I love you' card or just a plain one?" Elizabeth shifts [uncomfortably] and lowers her eyes: "I'm going to make you a plain one." Sandra to Amy: "You're not going to make me one, are you?" Amy: "Yes, I will. I'm going to make a nice one."

Name calling was another put-down strategy used by children. Frequently, name calling accompanied other put-downs. Name calling included pointed statements such as, "You're stupid" and "You're the baddest kid in here" as well as derogatory references such as "dumbhead," "dork," and "do-do head." Elkind (1976) has suggested that name calling signals the young child's ability to distinguish between words and the things they symbolize. The name calling described here did not have the quality of verbal play to which Elkind referred. There was an element of dominance in name calling behavior, as if an understood part of the message sent when calling another child dummy was, "and I dare you to do something about it."

Children demonstrated their attempts to exercise power over peers in ordering behavior, threats, and physical intimidation. Ordering behaviors were usually associated with establishing territories, securing materials, or managing the behavior of others. Children used an ordering tone to get children to change locations (e.g., "sit down," "get away from me," "move over"); to acquire materials ("gimme that," "get some more") and to control others ("don't do that," "stop that," "keep quiet"). Children threatened each other with physical attack (e.g., "I'ma hit you," "I'll give you a black eye"); with exposure to the teacher ("I'm gonna tell"); and with unspecified consequences in "you better" statements ("you better not mess with me," "you better stop") which carried an unspoken but clearly communicated 'or else' with them. Physical force was used by a small number of children and during the study no "fights" between children were observed.

As mentioned above, the relationship between Sarah and Bob was characterized by her verbal and physical domination. She ordered him about, called him names, and slapped him around continually. Other children occasionally hit, kicked, and pinched peers, but not according to any observable pattern. Many of the behaviors described above are demonstrated in the following excerpt. The relationship between Sarah and Bob is revealed and name calling, threatening, ordering, and physical dominance are exemplified.

> Bob is singing in baby talk as he works with the magnetic alphabet board. He repeats the phrase 'Bambi head' several times. He turns to Sarah: "You a Bambi head." Sarah slides her chair over to Bob and slaps him on the arm. After she returns, Bob repeats: "You a Bambi head." Sarah starts for him but Bob slaps himself on the spot where she had slapped. George to Sarah: "Don't you hit him." Sarah: "He can't call me a Bambi head." George: "You're not gonna slap him." Sarah: "I ain't no Bambi." George: "I'll slap you." Sarah: "You'll get in trouble." George: "I ain't gonna slap you, but I'ma tell." George turns to get the teacher's attention. Teacher's busy and the children let it drop.

Children generally were not gracious winners when they came out on top in confrontations with peers. A final way children put others down was to "rub it in" when one child bested another. Public proclamations such as, "I beat you," "I got it and you didn't," or "I showed you" were common in the classroom. Rubbing it in behavior, as demonstrated below, served to accent the critical point; putting others down was a strategy children used for improving their relative status by diminishing the influence and prestige of others while asserting their own.

> Nadine and Tess are cutting out geometric shapes to be glued onto a picture. Nadine grabs a square from the table. Tess: "That's mine!" Nadine: "It's mine!" Nadine holds the square away from Tess who struggles to get it back. Teacher observes them and says: "Why don't you try to find the missing piece then you'll both have what you need." They look but don't find the piece. As she looks, Nadine puts the square on the table. Tess grabs the square and sticks it under her paper. Tess glares at Nadine, says: "It's mine now!" Nadine continues to look but doesn't find the missing piece. Tess: "I got it, you didn't. I got it, you didn't." Nadine goes to teacher for relief.

Ways to respond to put-downs

Children demonstrated a well developed arsenal of defensive responses to put-down attempts by peers. These defensive strategies were important to children as they worked at protecting their status from the potential damages others could inflict. Since being foiled in attempts to discredit others offered public evidence of a kind of social ineptness, defensive responses probably served to deter put-downs to some degree.

One way chilren responded to put-downs was to categorically deny the accuracy of the information presented in the put-down. Such denials had the tone of righteous indignation. Usually these took form in statements such as, "No, I didn't" or "Yes, I can." As in the following example, the tone of categorical denials seemed to carry the additional message, "And I'll hear no more about it."

> Louise to Sarah: "You moved my chair." Louise's chair is on the opposite side of the table from its usual position. Sarah: "Louise, I did not put your chair over there " (points to chair). Benjamin: "I didn't do it." Gina: "I think I know who it is." Benjamin: "Louise put it over there to get Sarah in trouble." Sarah, thrusting her chin forward, proclaims: "I did not put it over there."

Children also tried to refute logically the accuracy of negative information directed at them. They constructed logical cases from the actual situations involved, called on other children to witness the efficacy of their arguments, and on occasion, fabricated evidence in their own defense. In the excerpt below, Benjamin attempted to discredit Sandra by name calling and accusing her of not knowing her colors. Sandra turned the tables on Benjamin by proving him wrong. Rod and Dee Dee offered information supporting Sandra's case, leaving Benjamin able only to offer a hollow denial of his original position. This interchange is a good example of the potentially costly effects of an ill-advised put-down attempt.

> Sandra to Benjamin: "Why did you use all those colors?" (They are coloring animal pictures.) Benjamin: "Shuddup Sandra-head." Sandra: "Sandra-head?" Benjamin: "You don't even know your colors." Sandra: "Uh-huh, look." She points to each crayon in her box and names its color correctly. Benjamin, holding up a purple crayon, says: "Uh-un, this is reddish . . . (pause)." Sandra: "That's purple." Benjamin: "Uh-un, you don't even know your colors." Sandra: "Yes, I do, watch me." She goes through them correctly again. Benjamin: "This isn't purple, it's red." Rod: "That's not red. Dee Dee, is that red?" Dee Dee: "No." Benjamin [tries to save face]: "It's purple. I said it was purple."

Another strategy for handling put-downs was to take an offensive posture and turn the aggression of the put-down back on the child making the original move. The most common form of this strategy was to turn name calling, ordering, or threats around and direct them back on aggressors in the same form. "You're a baby, Jerome" elicited "You're a baby, James;" "You better move" was answered with "You better move;" and so forth. Sometimes children's aggressive responses went beyond echoing original put-downs.

Some children embarrassed their challengers by accusing them of being "crazy" or "actin' funny." Some children launched full-blown retaliatory put-downs of those who challenged their status. These counter put-downs were not necessarily related in substance to the original accusations. The purpose of the counter attack was to impress on the challenger and others in the group that "I am not to be taken lightly" and that "those who attack me put themselves at risk." The following excerpt includes an exchange of offensive volleys between Elizabeth and Rod.

> Elizabeth to group working on an "O" handwriting paper at table 2. "You know what? I had a dream about roaches. And you know what? I woke up and dreamed I was covered with roaches; had roaches all over my bed. And you know what? I felt something moving on my back and I pulled off my shirt. (Pause) That's why I pulled off my nighty." Rod: "Why?" Elizabeth: " 'Cause there was a roach on me, idiot." Rod: "Uh-un, it was a . . . (pause). Elizabeth: "It was a roach! You can't do nothin' right." (She points to his "O" paper) "See one, two, three" (She touches each messy example of "O" as she counts). Rod: "One, two, three, four, five. You're only one. You're only one years old." Elizabeth: "Uh-un, I'm six, you can even ask Mrs. S." (Teacher). Elizabeth gestures toward the front board, says "See, look in the birthday calender. I'm six." Rod: "You're three years old."

Children also used turning away, changing the subject, and other forms of ignoring in response to put-down attempts. When children were in situations where their mistakes or inadequacies were being exposed by others, they often dropped their eyes to the floor, their chins to their chests, folded their arms, and waited for the spotlight to pass. Children in such situations were also observed turning away from accusors to begin conversation with someone else, ignoring the put-down, and offering an entirely new line of conversation. Sometimes they physically left the scene. The following excerpts include changing the subject as one child's response to

the threat of telling the teacher and an example of leaving the scene when an inadequacy is exposed.

> George and Tess are bantering back and forth: "My daddy'll beat your daddy." "So, my daddy'll beat your daddy's butt." "Your daddy's a water; cow; bear; jelly bean; etc." Finally, Tess seems bested, announces: "I'ma tell." George [detecting the possibility of being tattled on]: "Got a green?" (crayon). Tess checks her crayon box.
>
> Nadine to Tess: "See, I color fast." Tess: "Yeah, 'cause you scribble." Nadine: "I'm not scribblin', see." Tess reaches over and points to places where Nadine has colored outside the lines, says: "That's scribbling." Nadine gets up from the table and leaves, saying: "I need brown."

Another response to put-downs was to make a public appeal for sympathy. This kind of defense was used to deter physical aggression by exposing the cruelty of agressors and attracting protective support from others. Loud cries of "You hurt me" or "That hurt," and dramatic weeping were used to bring acts of physical aggression to public attention. One classroom incident serves to demonstrate this strategy.

> Sarah throws a pencil at Louise, hitting her across the fingers. Louise gets teary and finally breaks into soft crying. She surveys each face (including mine) to be sure each one sees she's hurt. Jerome sees her rippled lower lip and asks: "What's wrong with you?" Louise: "Sarah threw a pencil and hit these two fingers." Louise extends her fingers toward Jerome. Jerome: "I'ma tell. She hit her bad." Roger, in soft voice: "Don't cry, Louise." Sue: "It don't help to cry. It don't help to cry, do it Roger?" Sarah watches all this with arms folded and lower lip and chin thrust forward.

A final way children responded to put-downs was to accept the accuracy of negative information but work to reduce the effects by making a public confession, offering excuses, explaining the lack of severity of the offense, or "laughing off" the exposure as unimportant. Children made public gestures

of accepting responsibility or making confession as strategies for reducing the damaging effects of being exposed in a compromising position. Typically they made a show of correcting mistakes ("See, I fixed it") or promised to do better ("I'm going to do it right next time"). In some cases, they turned the words of their challengers on themselves, as in the following exchange:

> Sue: "Bob, get to work, you're makin' me mad."
> Bob: "Yeah, I'm makin' me mad, too."

Children offered excuses to mitigate their embarrassment. Excuses included those related to the source of put-downs ("I lost my paper" or "I wasn't through yet") and those of a more general character ("I have a sore ear"). Children sometimes tried to reduce the impact of put-downs by laughing them off or explaining that they were not important. When faced with physical domination by others, some children allowed the aggressors to have their way, then covered by laughing and/or making statements to recover their status ("So, I don't care"). Similarly, when bested by peers in face-to-face encounters, children often covered their retreats with aggressive sounding but empty rebuttels such as "So," "Oh yeah," and "Shuddup." An example follows.

> Sandra to group: "Today my mommy's coming to sit by me. She's never sat by me before" (in the lunchroom). Rod: "So?" Sandra to Rod: "Know what? I told my mommy that you're always pickin' on me."
> Rod: "Oh yea, I am not." Sandra: "Yes, you are."
> Rod: "So . . . so what . . . see if I care."

Conclusions

The social world of children is complex. The give and take of interactions with peers in school is only one dimension of children's face-to-face experience. Children learn to interpret and generate communication in a variety of contexts with a variety of interaction partners. Since this

study untertook the examination of child-to-child social behavior in a single classroom, the findings and conclusions are necessarily limited. In addition, it is recognized that alternative explanations of many of the interactive moves described in this paper are possible. It is important to stress that the field note entries included in the findings are examples selected from among hundreds of interaction events analyzed in the study. Each set of strategies reported was carefully scrutinized using "analytic induction" principles (Denzin, 1978; Lindesmith, 1952; Robinson, 1951) which force the researcher systematically to examine and reexamine analytic hypotheses in the light of dissonant cases and alternative explanations.

Three general conclusions drawn from the discriptive findings of this study are: (1) Children in the study actively participated in the construction of social events in their peer interactions; (2) They demonstrated an awareness that peer status was a product of social interaction; and (3) They utilized sophisticated interaction strategies to promote and protect their status in relation to their peers.

Socialized speech and the construction of social events

Piaget (1959) reported that nearly half of the speech produced by children up to about six years of age is "egocentric," that it is not directed at others to satisfy social needs but is directed toward the speakers themselves. Piaget's findings, according to Goodwin (1980), have "hardened into the dogma that the speech of young children is 'egocentric' until the age of six years" (p. 202). The conversational data of this research support findings of several other studies of children's language that the conversations of young children are typically not egocentric monologues but interactive exchanges (Ervin-Tripp, 1977; Garvey & Hogan, 1973; Keenan, 1977; Rosen & Rosen, 1973).

Piaget contrasted egocentric speech with "socialized" speech. Socialized speech replaces the egocentric variety at six or seven years and serves such *interactive functions* as the exchange of information, criticisms, commands, requests, threats, and questions and answers (Piaget, 1959). Socialized speech is responsive as opposed to unilateral. The children in this study were five and six years old, yet their interactions were filled with information sharing, criticisms, commands, and the other functions Piaget said were typical of socialized speech. In addition, the data provide evidence that children were adapting their strategies in response to communicative moves of their peers. The following conversational excerpt contains several elements which demonstrate the "socialized" nature of peer interaction in this study.

> While Sandra is away from her work, Elizabeth to the other children at table 2: "Look how bad Sandra's deer (coloring) looks." Teresa reaches out and makes a frowning face on Sandra's paper, says: "Yeah." Benjamin [in a show of solidarity] reaches over and makes a crayon slash on Sandra's paper. Elizabeth makes green spots on Sandra's deer. Rod: "I'm not gonna mark it, you'll get in trouble." Teresa: "Oh, look at Sandra's name. She messed up." Elizabeth looks and nods. Sandra returns, discovers her paper, moves close to Benjamin, says: "Who did that?" Benjamin looks around to see who's listening, says: "Elizabeth." Sandra moves next to Elizabeth, shoves the paper forward, says: "Why . . . (pause) Why did you do that?" Elizabeth removes her eyes from Sandra's stare, says: "I didn't do it." Sandra looks at Teresa: "Why did you do this?" Teresa: "I didn't." Sandra: "Did you do this, Dee Dee?" Dee Dee: "Uh-un." (Dee Dee looks at Elizabeth as she speaks.) Sandra to Elizabeth: "You did it and I know it. You're mean, mean, mean. I'm gonna call you mean all week. Meany, meany, meany." The bell rings and groups are changed.

Although occasional events were observed which might fit Piaget's description of egocentric speech, the overwhelming majority of children's

conversations were very much like the complex interaction quoted above. Data from this study support Goodwin's (1980) contention that children are capable of socialized speech from a very early age. This study suggests that such capacities are well developed by age five or six.

Tied to the notion of egocentric speech are beliefs that young children are developmentally incapable of using reasoning or taking the point of view of others into account in their interactions. Piaget (1969) wrote

> Conversations among young children remain rudimentary and linked to material action itself. Until seven years of age children scarcely know how to have discussions among themselves and confine themselves to make contradictory affirmations. (p. 20)

This study's conversational transcripts are filled with evidence that runs counter to Piaget's assertions on the rudimentary nature of children's conversations. As strategies for accomplishing status goals were discovered, it became evident that children were using reason to construct cases and build logical responses to peer questions and challenges. Two examples of children's uses of reason follow:

> Four girls enter the playhouse. Sue: "Who's gonna be the mother?" Dee Dee: "I am. I'm biggest." [She looks like a third grader] Sandra: "I am." Sue: [in 'take charge' voice]: "Elizabeth." Dee Dee stands next to Elizabeth and holds her hand next to Elizabeth's head to show how much taller she is. Sue: "Elizabeth." Elizabeth to Dee Dee: "You can be the big teenager. Teenagers are bigger than mothers." Dee Dee shrugs.

> Tess: "I'm almost done colorin'." Robin [mocking]: "do da-ba no da-ba-do." (Baby talk in same meter as Tess' speech.) George: "Robin, don't start actin' up now." Nadine: "Know what? If you talk like that, you won't be able to . . . (pause) you will always talk like that." Robin: "Do-do ga-ga." Nadine: "You keep talkin' like that and you won't be able to stop. You'll always hafta talk like that." Tess: "Yeah, my grandmother talked like that when she was a little girl and she don't talk right now." Robin seems to be thinking this over. Tess: "I know that's so 'cause I asked my grandma. She didn't talk right and now she don't know how."

Several things become clear when looking at these and other examples from the conversational data. Children's interactions were complex. They listened to each other and constructed cases based on the positions taken by others. They marshaled evidence for their positions and evaluated the merit of their peers' arguments. Children's conversations did not qualify as "collective monologue" which Piaget explained, "is really a mutual excitation to action rather than a real exchange of ideas" (1969, p. 20). It was clear from analyzing conversations that children were not talking to themselves but participating in dynamic, interactive dialogue.

Shultz, Florio, and Erickson (1982) identified three aspects of communicative knowledge that are essential to competetent participation in the creation of interaction events: (a) knowledge of assumptions about proper ways for people to interact in various social occasions, (b) possession of the verbal and nonverbal performance skills necessary for producing appropriate communicative action, and (c) possession of the interpretive skills necessary for making sense of the communicative intentions of others. Children in this study demonstrated repeatedly that they understood the norms which regulated child-to-child interaction in their classroom. They evidenced performance and interpretive skills which varied from child to child but which were developed to the extent that all children were capable of active participation in classroom social interchange.

Peer Status

Researchers who have studied group formation among young children have noted that status hierarchies are developed based on children's abilities to dominate each other in conflict situations (Freedman, 1977; Strayer & Strayer, 1976). This study describes strategies children used to improve and maintain status on their classroom hierarchy. It was clear as data analysis proceeded

that virtually every interaction qualified as a potential "conflict situation." Children negotiated meanings of status among themselves at each interactive opportunity.

It is axiomatic for symbolic interactionists that definitions of social situations are constructed in interaction and reconstructed at each interactive encounter (Blumer, 1969). As Schwartz and Jacobs (1979) explain:

> From this perspective, social meanings (which direct human behavior) do not inhere in activities, or social objects themselves. Rather, meanings are conferred upon social events by interacting individuals, who must first interpret what is going on from the social context in which these events occur. This emerging gestalt (the "definition of the situation") is seen to result from the interplay of biography, situation, nonverbal communication, and liguistic exchange that characterizes all interaction.(p. 8)

In this study, relative status was a "social object" which children defined and redefined in interactions within the contexts of their school world. It was clear that relative status was defined as very important and that it was "normal" behavior to use child-to-child interaction as a vehicle for promoting status, for putting others down, and for defending against the promotions and put-downs of others. Conflict was defined as a norm and children demonstrated well developed capacities for participating in the processes through which status was negotiated in this classroom peer culture.

Social sophistication

Goffman (1981) described the complexity of interaction among adults as follows:

> Everyone knows that when individuals in the presence of others respond to events, their glances, looks, and postural shifts carry all kinds of implications and meaning. When in these settings words are spoken, then tone of voice, manner of uptake, restarts, and the variously positioned pauses similarly qualify. As does the manner of listening.

> Every adult is wonderfully accomplished in producing all of these effects, and wonderfully perceptive in catching their significance when performed by accessible others. (pp. 1-2)

When Goffman used the phrase "every adult," he sent the implicit message that every child may not be so accomplished in producing and perceiving the effects described. The findings of this and other studies by the author confirm Goffman's implied distinction. Young children's interactions lack much of the structure which defines adult social behavior. However, the degree of sophistication kindergarten children exhibit in their face-to-face encounters is considerable.

As children's strategies for acquiring and protecting status were revealed in the data it became clear that they had learned and were capable of using many of the ritualized moves which characterize adult interactions. The following are some examples of children's strategies which parallel adult "impression management" techniques described by Goffman (1959; 1967; 1971):

1. Children used hedging, joking, and teasing to protect their overtures toward others from the embarrassment of possible rejection.

2. They aggressively promoted their own status by offering favorable information about themselves while introducing unfavorable facts about others.

3. They challenged children who attempted to acquire status to which they were not entitled.

4. Children used sophisticated means to answer the challenges of others, including denials, explanations, excuses, and apologies.

As these examples indicate, children's knowledge of adult interaction ettiquette was substantial (for a more comprehensive examination of the relationship of child-to-child to adult interaction rituals, see Hatch, 1984c; 1985).

Implications

The influences of peer interaction on the socialization of young children are not well understood. Neither are the interactive processes through which children internalize cultural values in their complex encounters across many contexts. This study and others like it provide descriptions of everyday social reality as experienced by real children in real classrooms. Such studies provide analytic descriptions which contribute the collective examination of everyday life in school, peer interaction, status relations, and childhood socialization.

The "face-to-face" orientation of this research may have applications to other areas of investigation. Approaching the study of social phenomena in school from a face-to-face perspective may offer a fresh way of thinking about and looking at schools and schooling. In addition, it may be that, in the same way the work of face-to-face sociologists has provided new insight into adult social behavior, so can the application of such a perspective improve understandings of children's social development.

Suggested areas for additional study can be drawn from this report. Valuable insight would be gained by conducting similar classroom studies asking similar questions across a variety of settings. Studies designed to compare children's strategies for acquiring and maintaining status in classrooms with differing organizational formats (open and traditional) or goal structures (cooperative and competitive) would be beneficial. The effects of socioeconomic influences on children's status relations is another area of suggested research emphasis. For instance, it may be that the strategies of children in a low socioeconomic status urban kindergarten are different from those developed by children from an upper middle class, suburban background.

In an effort to begin to understand how social goals are internalized by children, an involved longitudinal study or series of studies is called for. Such studies would necessarily include investigations of children's interactions at home, in informal play settings, in preschool, and at a series of school grade levels. A careful study of children's social behavior from an interactionist perspective could yield more than just a description of how children develop face-to-face competence. It may be that such a description would provide valuable insights into the very processes of childhood socialization.

Hinely and Ponder (1979) made a useful distinction between "improvers" and "describers" as they discussed the development and utilization of theory (p. 135). Researchers interested in improvement begin with questions such as, "How can things be changed?" For describers, three questions are of key importance. "A descriptive question--what seems to be happening here?; an analytical question--why are these event occurring?; and a question of understanding--what do these events mean in the context of the classroom?" (Hinely & Ponder, 1979, p. 135). The study reported here is descriptive. The goal has been to provide a description and analysis intended to improve understandings of what actually happens in the social context of a classroom.

Genishi (1979) wrote on the similarities between teachers and researchers. She observed that both value information about how children behave and think, and both seek to facilitate children's learning and development. Genishi summarized: "The teacher of young children cannot teach successfully, nor can the researcher investigate fully, unless both consider what children themselves experience and think" (1979, p. 249). This study is a systemic attempt to reveal what children themselves experience and think.

It is hoped that the descriptions and analyses will provide teachers and others responsible for children's experiences in school with an enriched framework for considering the complex world of child-to-child interactions.

APPENDIX A

Taxonomy of Children's Strategies for Acquiring and Protecting Status

A. Self-Promotion Domain

1. Ways to Practice Self-Promotion

a. Personal Superiority Promotions

b. Associative Superiority Promotions

2. Ways to Respond to Self-Promotions

a. One-upsmanship Strategies

b. Bandwagon Strategies

c. Challenging Strategies

d. Ignoring Strategies

B. Put-Down Domain

1. Ways to Put Others Down

a. Pointing Out Inadequacies

b. Expressing Condescension

c. Name Calling

d. Ordering

e. Threatening

f. Intimidating

g. Rubbing It In

2. Ways to Respond to Put-Downs

a. Denial Strategies

b. Logical Strategies

c. Offensive Strategies

d. Ignoring Strategies

e. Sympathy Seeking Strategies

f. Covering Strategies

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